

Apparatus for transferring poultry carcasses

The invention relates to an apparatus for transferring poultry carcasses from a first overhead conveyor to a second overhead conveyor.

Such transfer apparatuses are among others known from European patent application 0.259.920 and from US patents 5.453.045 and 5.672.098, the contents of which being included in this text by reference.

The poultry, chicken or turkeys, hanging upside down from their legs or knees in hangers are transferred here from the one overhead conveyor, for instance a cooling line, by means of one or more transfer wheels to a subsequent overhead conveyor, for instance a drip conveyor. Both conveyors can be situated in line with each other, but also at an angle, for instance 90 degrees.

It is of importance here which rotation direction both overhead conveyors have with respect to each other. Depending on that an even or odd number of transfer wheels have to be deployed. When the rotation direction is opposite, an odd number of transfer wheels is necessary, the orientation of the carcasses with respect to the line remaining the same. In case of a same rotation direction an even number is necessary, the orientation of the carcasses with respect to the line being reversed. In each case there is question of a central transfer wheel and one or several transfer wheels placed between the central transfer wheel and one or both conveyors, for correction of the rotation direction of the carcasses and/or for synchronisation.

For the slaughter process the orientation of the carcass is of importance.

For the one treatment it is for instance necessary that the carcass is transported with the breast forward through the processing station in question, for another treatment an orientation with the breast to the outside is desirable.

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Usually hangers are used the orientation of which with respect to the process path or conveyor is fixed. There are hangers available that are provided with means for rotating the hanger with respect to the trolley in question moving past the conveyor to which trolley the hanger is attached. Such hangers, however, require an additional investment, and moreover are not always suitable to be accommodated in an existing slaughter line.

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It is an object of the invention to provide a provision with which also with the usual "fixed" hangers or leg shackles the orientation of the carcass can be changed, in particular near the transition from the one overhead conveyor to the next overhead conveyor.

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From one aspect the invention to that end provides an apparatus for transferring poultry carcasses from a first overhead conveyor to a second overhead conveyor, in which overhead conveyors the carcasses are transported suspended from shackles and the like, comprising a transfer wheel rotatable about a vertical axis and positioned between both overhead conveyors, which wheel is provided with holders for the carcasses and with first means for transferring the carcasses from the first overhead conveyor to the transfer wheel and with second means for transferring the carcasses from the transfer wheel to the second overhead conveyor, orientation means further being present for equalizing the spacial initial orientation of the carcass in the holder at receipt on the transfer wheel and the spacial final orientation of the carcass in the holder at its discharge from the transfer wheel to the second overhead conveyor. In this way it is achieved that the absolute orientation of the carcass during transfer by the transfer wheel can stay unaltered, but that also the orientation with

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respect to the transfer wheel will change, and for instance the carcass being received on the transfer wheel with breast radially oriented to the inside and being discharged with the breast radially to the outside, to take up an ideal position for the next treatment.

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Preferably the orientation means are adapted for keeping the spacial orientation of the carcass in the holder constant during the transport on the transfer wheel. In that case the transfer to the second conveyor can take place at any given point along the circumference of the transfer wheel, and an arrangement with several, second overhead conveyors to be selectively provided with carcasses can be realised.

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Preferably the holders are bearing mounted in the transfer wheel to be rotatable about themselves about a vertical axis. It is furthermore preferred here that the orientation means are adapted for relative rotation of the holders with respect to the transfer wheel, preferably for letting the holders rotate 1:1 with the transfer wheel.

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In a further development of the apparatus according to the invention the orientation means comprise first orientation means for orienting a first of the holders, and second orientation means for orienting others of the holders, which second orientation means are operated by the first orientation means, in which way a simple sequential drive of the holders is thus realised.

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It is preferred here that the first orientation means comprise a first driving disc provided on the first holder, a second driving disc placed loosely on the axis but retained in spacial orientation, and a driving belt or driving chain running around both, the diameter of both driving discs preferably being equal.

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In order to always guarantee a pure orientation of the holders, even after a

longer operative time, it is preferred that the orientation means are further provided with a tension pulley for the driving belt or driving chain.

In a further development of the orientation means the second orientation means comprise a first toothed wheel that is attached to the first holder in a rotatably fixed manner, a central toothed wheel freely rotatable on the axis and driven by the first toothed wheel, as well as second toothed wheels attached in a rotatably fixed manner to every other holder, which second toothed wheels are in driving engagement with the central toothed wheel and preferably have a diameter that is equal to the one of the first toothed wheel.

From another aspect the invention provides an apparatus for transferring poultry carcasses from a first overhead conveyor to a second overhead conveyor, in which overhead conveyors the carcasses are transported suspended from shackles and the like, comprising a transfer wheel rotatable about a vertical axis and positioned between both overhead conveyors, which wheel is provided with holders for the carcasses and with first means for transferring the carcasses from the first overhead conveyor to the transfer wheel and with second means for transferring the carcasses from the transfer wheel to the second overhead conveyor, orientation means further being present for rotating the holders with respect to the transfer wheel during the transport of the holders by the transfer wheel.

Preferably the orientation means are adapted for 1:1 rotation of the holders and the transfer wheel.

From a further aspect the invention provides a holder for suspended transport of a poultry carcass, provided with accommodation spaces for the legs of the carcass, the accommodation spaces each forming a continuous slit in horizontal direction. In this way it is achieved that the

carcass can be discharged from the holder in a direction which is the same as the direction of insertion of the carcass into the holder. As a result rotation of the holder can be dispensed with under conditions.

- 5 Preferably the distance between the accommodation spaces at their one end is different from the distance therebetween at their other end. In this way in a transfer wheel with such holders a fluent, and possibly direct accommodation/transfer of the carcasses becomes possible in case the distance between the legs in the hangers of the first overhead conveyor is different from the one of the hangers of the second overhead conveyor.

The invention further provides an apparatus of the aforementioned type, provided with such holders.

- 15 The invention further provides a method as described in this application.

The invention will be elucidated on the basis of the exemplary embodiment shown in the attached drawings, in which:

- 20 Figure 1A schematically shows a top view of transfer apparatus according to the invention, placed between two overhead conveyors;

- 25 Figure 1B schematically shows a top view of a transfer apparatus according to the invention, placed between two overhead conveyors, in alternative arrangement;

Figure 2 shows a top view of a transfer wheel of an apparatus according to the invention;

- 30 Figure 3 shows a top view inclined from above of a part of the transfer wheel of figure 2;

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Figure 4 shows a side view of the transfer wheel of the figures 2 and 3;

Figure 5 schematically shows a vertical cross-section of the arrangement of the transfer wheel according to the figures 2-4;

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Figure 6A schematically shows a vertical cross-section of a first holder for the transfer wheel of the preceding figures; ↗

Figures 6B schematically shows a vertical cross-section of a second holder for the transfer wheel according to figures 2-5; and ↘

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Figures 7A and 7B show a front view and a top view, respectively, of the hanging part of a holder for an apparatus according to the invention.

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In figure 1A a transfer apparatus 1 is shown, by means of which carcasses, supplied on a first overhead conveyor 2, for instance a cooling conveyor, are supplied in the direction A, suspended from hangers 8 on a transport line, such as a rail and/or a chain 3. The overhead conveyor 2 is turned about rotation wheel 4, the carcasses being transferred from the overhead conveyor 2 onto transfer wheel 12 of the transfer apparatus 10 at the location of transfer station 40. At the downstream side of the transfer apparatus 10 a second overhead conveyor 5 is placed, for instance a drip conveyor, having a transport line 6 and a rotation wheel 7, along which the holders 9 transported with the transport line 6 are moved in the direction C, past transfer station 50, where the carcasses from the transfer apparatus 10 are received.

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The transfer apparatus 10 here is substantially shown with a rotation axis 13 and a transfer wheel 12, on which the carcass holders 11 are supported to rotate along in the direction B.

Other arrangements are conceivable, such as shown in figure 1B, wherein

between the turning wheel 4 and the transfer wheel 12 and/or between the turning wheel 7 and the transfer wheel 12 simple transfer wheels 7a, 7b, at their edges provided with notches for accommodation of the legs of the carcasses, have been placed, for reversing the direction of rotation of the path of the carcasses and/or alteration in the pitch between the carcasses. The synchronisation means necessary for it and the driving means are not further discussed here. They are known per se to the expert, referring as well to US patent specifications 5.453.045 and 52.672.098, as well as European patent application 0.259.920, all incorporated herein by reference.

In figure 2 a detail of the arrangement of figure 1B is schematically shown with transfer wheel 12 placed between two transfer wheels 7a and 7b, which themselves are contiguous to the first and second conveyors 2 and 5, respectively.

In the example of the figures sixteen holders 11 are rotatably supported on the transfer wheel 12. It here regards fifteen identical holders 11b and one different holder 11a, shown in figures 6B and 6A, respectively. The holder 11a comprises a vertical axis 20a, which by means of bearings 23a is rotatably bearing mounted in the transfer wheel 12. As can be seen in figure 5, the transfer wheel 12 is connected to the axis 13 in a rotatably fixed manner. In its turn said axis 13 is connected to a disc 14 in a rotatably fixed manner, which disc 14 at its circumference is provided with a tothing 15. Via said tothing 15 the axis 13 is driven, for instance by coupling to one or both drives of the overhead conveyor, possible through the intermediary of synchronisation means.

On the axis 13 there furthermore is a chain wheel 18, that is relatively rotatable with respect to the axis 13, but which is stopped from rotating by a means that is not further shown. On the holder 11a, particularly at the upper end of the axis 20a, a chain wheel 16 is attached in a rotatably fixed

manner, a chain 27 running around the chain wheels 6 and 18, as can be seen in figure 5. A chain tensioner 19 (also see figure 2) is provided here for keeping the chain 17 at the right tension. The chain transfer 15 with chain wheel 16 and chain 17, and also chain tensioner 19, are shielded to the outside and upwards by means of a hood 26, as can also be seen in figure 3.

Below the chain wheel 16 a toothed wheel 24a is attached to the axis 20a in an also rotatably fixed manner. Said toothed wheel 24a is meshed with a toothing 25a at the circumference of a large central toothed wheel 25 (also see figure 3), which central toothed wheel 25 is coaxial with and freely rotatable with respect to the axis 13.

The other holders 11b are substantially equal to the holder 11a, but they are not provided with a chain wheel 16. They are also meshed with the teeth of their toothed wheel 24b with the toothing 25a of the central toothed wheel 25.

In this example the toothed wheels 24a, 24b have twenty-nine teeth, with a diameter of the pitch circle of 116 mm, and the central toothed wheel 25 has one hundred and seventy-six teeth, with a diameter of the pitch circle of 704 mm.

When the disc 14 and thus the axis 13 is rotated in the direction B, the transfer wheel 12 will also rotate along. In that way also the holders 11a, 11b are taken along in rotation. As a result the chain wheel 16 is taken along as well, by the holder 11a. Because the chain wheel 16 is connected to the chain wheel 18 via chain wheel 17, and said chain wheel 18 does not rotate along, the chain wheel 16 will counter rotate in the direction D (also see figure 1A). Because the diameters of the chain wheels 16 and 18 are equal, the spacial orientation of the holder 11a will not change during rotation of the transfer wheel 12.

The holder 11a will however rotate relatively with respect to the transfer wheel 12. Said rotational movement is transferred to the central toothed wheel 25 which because of the mesh with the holders 11 is taken along in the direction G (coinciding with the direction of rotation B), but rotating a little faster. Because of the mesh of the toothed wheels 24b of the holders 11b with the toothing 25a of the central toothed wheel 25, the holders 11b are also rotated with respect to the transfer wheel 12, in exactly the same degree and in the exact same direction as the holder 11a.

As can be seen in figure 1A and 2 the spacial orientation of the holders 11 here remains the same, and thus of the carcasses suspended in the holders 11. In this way during transferring the carcasses from the first conveyor to the second conveyor, two birds are killed with one stone, because in that way it is also achieved that the carcasses are transferred to the second conveyor in the orientation suitable for the next treatment. In that way separate rotation means for the holders on the second conveyor 5 can be dispensed with. The transfer apparatus 10 in this way is very suitable to be deployed in -existing- slaughter lines with hangers that are not rotatable in themselves.

In the figures 7A and 7B a hanger 21 is shown which is particularly suitable for the holder 11.

The hanger 21 is attached to the lower end of the axis 20, in a rotatably fixed manner. The hanger comprises an inverted U-shaped shackle 27, at the lower ends of which narrow horizontal plates 30 are fixedly attached. At the insertion end the narrow plates 30 have been provided with inclined upwardly extending ends 33, and at the discharge side with flat ends 34.

In the middle a rod 28 extends downwards from the axis 20 which is fixedly attached to it, at the lower end of which rod a plate 29 is fixedly attached, which also at the insertion side is turned upwardly inclined with

portions 32 and at the discharge end has a flat end member 35.

Between the plates 30 and the plate 29 thus two endless passages 31 have been formed. The legs of a carcass are inserted in that direction E, at the location of the transfer station 40. The inclined turned end portions 32 and 33 prevent that the legs can move back. During rotation of the transfer wheel 12 the carcass is suspended from the hangers 21 with the leg ends supported on the edges of the passages 31. Arrived at the transfer station 50 the legs are engaged with a suitable means and urged in the direction F out of the passages 31, in order to be accommodated in the holders of hangers of the second conveyor 5.

The distances X and Y between the access openings of the passages 31 situated on either side may differ from each other, in order to fit the (then different) leg distance in the hangers of the overhead conveyors situated near the opening in question.

It is to be understood that the above description is included to illustrate the operation of the preferred embodiments and is not meant to limit the scope of the invention. The scope of the invention is to be limited only by the following claims. From the above discussion, many variations will be apparent to one skilled in the art that would yet be encompassed by the spirit and scope of the present invention.